

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Student Conservation Association, Inc.

**Application ID:** 13ND146755

**Program Name:** Veterans Fire AmeriCorps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

#### Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The applicant provides factual evidence that veterans are in need of employment and that public lands are in need of fire prevention and fuels mitigation, among other conservation needs, as referenced in President Obama's Veterans Skills to Jobs Act and data from the United States Forest Service regarding the acreage that has been burned from wildfires.

(+) The applicant documents the urgent need for fire prevention and fuels mitigation in residential communities bordering public lands. The Wildland Urban Interface is an at-risk ecosystem in part because 60% of new homes are built in fire hazard areas. Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, California, and North Dakota have a high incidence of forest fires as evidenced by federal dollars dedicated to service in these states by Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC), California Conservation Corps (CCC) and Student Conservation Association (SCA) and Veterans Fire AmeriCorps (VFA).

(+) The applicant clearly requests 44.46 MSY for a total of 136 AmeriCorps members broken down into 100 quarter-time Members and 36 half-time Members. The applicant identifies how those Members will be split among partner organizations to appropriately support the five western states identified and makes a strong case for the physical nature of the service and the remote locations. The request is well aligned for limited-time Members.

(+) Environmental stewardship service on public lands in a camp-based setting provides structure similar to the military style they are accustomed. Physically challenging job tasks match their physical fitness and trainers serve an additional role as mentors facilitating the transition to civilian life. Through experiential learning, AmeriCorps members increase their employment skills in wildland fire prevention, mitigation, response, and disaster readiness.

(+) The program design is a natural fit matching rural communities with limited resources for fire mitigation services with a high-quality service opportunity to mobilize an underutilized workforce. With experience, training, and certificate red cards in hand, eligibility for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Wildland Firefighter apprenticeship program and entry level resource management with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) make post-service agency hires a real possibility.

- (+) The model selected by the applicant for this project is an evidence-informed model with a five-year history of use by the USFS-Veterans Fire Corps (VFC). Data collection and focused surveys define specific outcomes and there is a direct correlation between outcomes and the specific services provided to Members and partner agencies.
- (+) The applicant identifies how they will measure impact through use of reporting logs, the Search Institute evaluation method, and through an external evaluator from Texas A & M University. The applicant matches these tools to the anticipated outcomes which will not only increase veterans' employment skills in environmental stewardship careers leading to economic stability, but also restore 785 acres of public lands
- (-) The applicant provides limited community data about the needs of veterans including their socioeconomic status. The lack of data makes it difficult to determine the specific needs of veterans within the targeted communities.
- (-) The applicant did not provide specific information about the targeted states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and North Dakota as to economic conditions of residents in the targeted areas. The applicant did not provide sufficient information about the level of need for proposed employment training services for veterans..
- (-) The application lacks specific information that identifies why AmeriCorps members are needed or highly effective to conduct the specific activities identified for environmental stewardship that the host organizations could not do with existing resources.
- (-) The applicant does not detail the actual functions of the four partner agencies. Specifically, the applicant does not provide sufficient information about what forest fire mitigation activities the particular partner may be involved with and the supporting training that will be provided to the AmeriCorps members serving with these partners. A clear understanding of the various partner organization roles and utilization of the AmeriCorps members was not provided.